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## Editorial: State of the Union/It's not good, thanks to Bush

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The state of the union is strong, President Bush said Tuesday night in the final summing-up speech of his term. But Bush didn't tell it straight. The state of the union is weaker than it should be and certainly weaker than it was when he took office. His wrongheaded foreign and domestic policies are to blame.

This administration made the union weaker by failing to grasp and act against the threat from Al-Qaida prior to the horrific attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Mounting evidence -- which this administration has fought hard to keep from public view -- suggest the attacks could might have been thwarted. Bush observed that there have been no attacks since Sept. 11, but his point is what? There was only one foreign terrorist attack on U.S. soil in the more than 200 preceding years of American history.

This administration made the union weaker internally and externally by misleading it into an unnecessary war that has cost tens of billions of taxpayer dollars, 500 American lives and counting, plus the goodwill of the world.

This administration entered office enjoying the prospect of unprecedented federal surpluses totaling almost \$6 trillion. It proceeded to waste those surpluses on tax cuts hugely larger than anything required for economic stimulus. The cuts weren't designed with stimulus in mind at all. They were crony capitalist raids on the federal treasury to benefit the very wealthiest Americans. Bush implied Tuesday night that every American got tax relief last year, but that's not true. A quarter of all households got no tax cut at all, while fully half got less than \$500. Meanwhile the economy was shedding 2 million jobs and the administration was refusing to even extend paltry unemployment benefits to those out of work. There was a reason why sales at Tiffany grew 16 percent last Christmas and sales at Wal-Mart grew less than 4 percent.

Today, the nation's financial future looks bleak. The gap between future federal obligations already in law and future revenue available to pay for them now stands at more than \$45 trillion, more than four times the nation's entire annual economic output. Social Security and Medicare account for a substantial amount of that gap, but the nation now has no money to fix them, even as the huge boomer generation nears retirement. The country confronts an abhorrent dilemma: renege on promises made to aging fathers and mothers who have paid their dues and their taxes, or saddle their children with a crushing financial burden, or both.

In another arrogant display of crony capitalism, this administration trashed environmental rules and programs that had been embraced by a generation of both Republicans and Democrats. Science became a tool of indoctrination rather than illumination for this administration.

This president campaigned as a mild-mannered, centrist Republican who promised domestic compassion and foreign-policy humility. He won a disputed and divisive election, but instead of the unifying balm he promised and the nation badly needed, he rammed radical domestic and foreign policies down the throats of the American people and the world community.

Looking to 2004, the president seems to promise more of the same. He plainly sensed that domestic issues are taking center stage with voters, and he devoted nearly half his speech to pocketbook issues such as jobs and health insurance. Yet his actual proposals seemed familiar and reflexive, driven more by some long-held White House creed than by the actual needs of the nation.

The president noted, for example, that millions of Americans are still seeking work in a sputtering job market. Yet he offered only the most paltry of training proposals and, predictably, a plan to take the temporary tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 and make them permanent. It is certainly true that those tax cuts pumped billions of dollars into the economy. And yet the economy has not created even one-fifth of the 1.8 million jobs that Bush promised last spring. Last month it created only 1,000 jobs. Making the last tax cuts permanent, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would only consign the nation to permanent budget deficits and rising debt loads.

It was much the same with health care. Noting the rising number of uninsured Americans, the president proposed a new expansion of tax-deductible Health Savings Accounts. Yet the government has already tested such accounts, and the General Accounting Office found that they appealed chiefly to affluent families who already had health insurance and used the accounts mainly as tax shelters.

When he confronts legitimate national challenges and Americans' social anxieties, this president frequently says just the right, reassuring thing. He promises just the right action, then delivers something wholly unrecognizable, something created to benefit the narrow class of cronies with which he identifies. He has elevated bait and switch to an art form. Why Americans should expect anything different in the year to come was one question the president left unanswered.

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